

Winter Camel Trek
8 Days & option of free city walking tour of Ulaanbaatar

WINTER CAMEL TREK



‘Your ethics, the people, and the experience. All fantastic.’

Richard Maxwell, tailor made option

This is a customisable trip. It is adaptable, giving you the freedom to build a unique and personal trip for your chosen date. Upgrade your accommodation for all - or just part - of your trip, slow down the pace with few extra nights here and there or add a few more active adventures along the way. All images used throughout this document were taken either by EL guests or members of the EL team. This is the Mongolia that you will also experience.

Our Winter Camel Trek In Brief



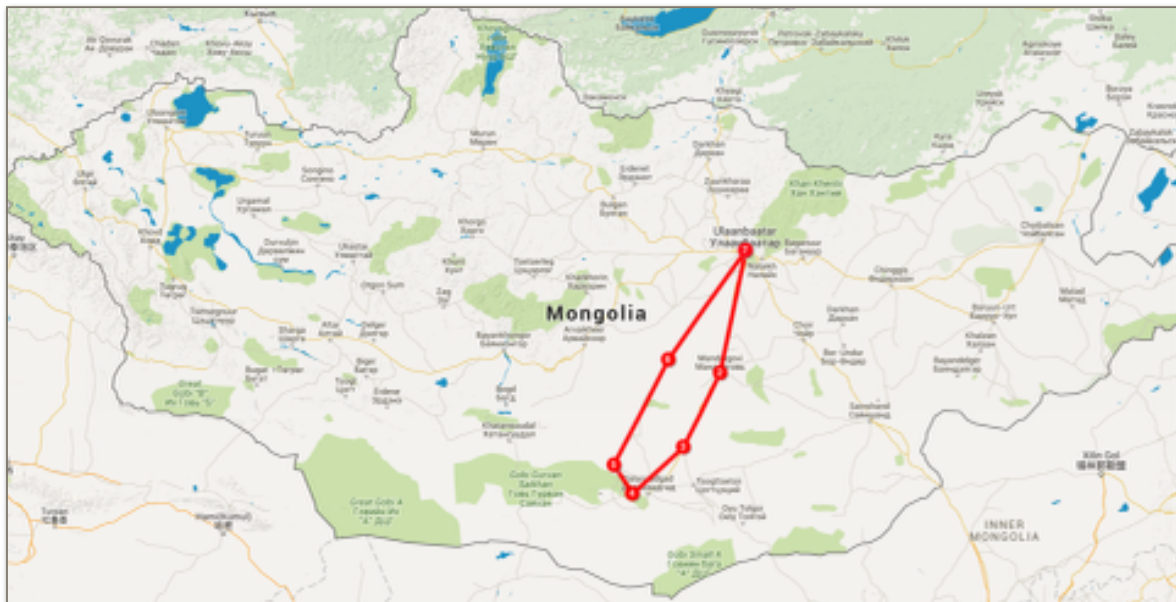
The Gobi Desert is Asia's largest desert and the immensity and diversity of the desert form the backdrop to this winter experience based around a four-day camel trek. A winter camel trek through the Gobi Desert is an adventure true to local traditions. For centuries, up until the 1920's, the Gobi was traversed by camel trains - typically travelling in the winter months - allowing the camels the summer months to recuperate when grazing is best.

You'll explore, discover and understand the Gobi in winter - its vast gravel plains, its 2800m mountains and its gorges - meet some of the people that make their home in these remarkable landscapes and learn about the Bactrian camel and the essential role it plays in the lives of the herders in the region.

Winter is a quintessential Mongolian season. It is cold, very cold, but the cold is an important part of what makes Mongolia and its landscapes extraordinary at this time of year. For all of our winter trips, we provide traditional felt boots, hand-made goat skin blankets and can provide winter deels as well. You'll spend most nights in a ger - warming yourself by the stove. The night skies more than make up for the challenge of the temperatures. Winter in Mongolia is a remarkable experience - especially as the Mongolians you meet will be very proud to welcome foreign visitors in wintertime.

Quick Overview

Ulaanbaatar				
Day to suit you	Discover Ulaanbaatar I City walking tour	Your own choice of accommodation	Free transfer	Local Lunch I Welcome drink
Gobi Desert				
Day One	Dalanzadgad	Family apartment in provincial town - with Uurna	600km on asphalt road	B/L/D
Day Two	Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park I Yolyn Am	Basic but private ger at family operated ger camp - with Gelgergrash family	100km on dirt and asphalt road	B/L/D
Day Three - Five	Camel Trek I Bayanzag I Flaming Cliffs	With local families Day Five - Basic but private ger at family operated ger camp - with Gelgergrash family	-	B/L/D
Day Six & Seven	Erdenedalai Homestay	With Nergui herding family	Day Six - 255km on dirt road	B/L/D
Ulaanbaatar				
Day Eight	Ulaanbaatar	Your own choice of accommodation	280km on asphalt and dirt road	B/L



Day By Day

Day One

Dalanzadgad



Rather than seeing this transfer day as a bore of a drive, adjust your way of thinking and see it as a Mongolian road trip. True, it will feel like a long day on the road but we break it up with a picnic lunch where you can stop for a while and take in the view. We recommend removing your watch and let the day and the journey unfold. Do not spend time in the van thinking 'when will we get there'- you are already there; surrounded by the beauty that is Mongolia.

Is Dalanzadgad considered a highlight of Mongolia by the guidebook writers? No! But, it is a vibrant town and staying here will give you an understanding as to the way of life of Mongolia's small town inhabitants. You can also explore the Dalanzadgad Museum and the surprisingly great Camel Museum with their presentation of the Gobi. The square with its dinosaur statues is where locals of all ages come to take the air. It is worth spending time in, especially in the evening and you may well be approached by local students wanting to practise their English or who just want to interact with a foreigner.

You'll be hosted by a young family headed by Uugantuya and her husband Galbadrakh at their simple apartment in Dalanzadgad. Consider this a one-night Gobi Desert Airbnb! You get to experience real life and at the same time help to provide an additional income to a young family starting out in life.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Simple apartment in Dalanzadgad. Consider this a one-night Gobi Desert Airbnb! You get to experience real life and at the same time help to provide an additional income to a young family headed by Uugantuya and her husband Galbadrakh - although they may not be there due to work commitments.
 - **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** Roughly 600km on asphalt road (approximately 9-10 hours driving time not including stops. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions.
-

Day Two

Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park



Explore the interior of the Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park - Mongolia's largest national park – a mountainous terrain rising out of the extensive desert plains and a region of incredible biological diversity. This mountainous region was formed by the same tectonic activity that created the Himalayas and is part of the Gobi Altai Range – the outer crumple zone of the Himalayan geological activity.



This includes exploring Yolyn Am - meaning Vultures Gorge/Mouth/Canyon it takes its name for the Lammergeier's (Bearded Vultures) that you may see circling on the thermals. It is renowned for its sheet of ice several meters thick that forms during the winter in the narrow defile. The water tables beneath the Gobi Gurvan Saikhan were laid down by ancient processes - when the mountains began to lift, and fault lines cracked open, water squeezed up from below sought the easiest route downhill.



You'll also visit the spectacular Khavtsgait rock petroglyphs. The petroglyphs show the culture, art and religious beliefs of the Bronze Age people who lived in the Mongolian Gobi and its neighbouring areas starting about 4000 years ago. The views are stunning.

You will stay close to Bayanzag - an ancient rock formation and one of the most important areas in Mongolia for dinosaur fossils. Bayanzag means 'Rich in Saxauls' and the name shows what is important for the Mongolian people – not the red sandstone cliffs named the 'Flaming Cliffs' by Roy Chapman Andrews but the small desert shrub that is nurtured by the rare outwash from the surrounding gullies.

The area of 'zag' (Saxaul) which gives the area its Mongolian name, is only a short walking distance from your ger accommodation so can also be easily explored.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Basic but private ger at small family operated ger camp (5-6 gers). Asian style outside long drop toilet. No showers.



The Gelgegarash family are retired herders and grandparents and part of the Ankh San Cooperative - a herder cooperative engaged in small-scale vegetable growing and sustainable tourism. They are of the older generation and are typically reserved and keep themselves to themselves. However, they warmly receive visitors if you would like to meet them.

Your accommodation tonight is located roughly 6km from the Flaming Cliffs so you have to visit by vehicle. However, the area of 'zag' (Saxaul) which gives the area its Mongolian name, is only a short walking distance from your ger accommodation so could easily be explored.

- **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** Roughly 150km on asphalt and dirt road (approximately 3-4 hours driving time not including stops throughout the day. Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions.
-

Day Three - Five

Camel Trek



A winter camel trek through the Gobi Desert is an adventure true to local traditions. For centuries, up until the 1920's, the Gobi was traversed by camel trains – typically travelling in the winter months – allowing the camels the summer months to recuperate when grazing is best.

You'll travel on Bactrian (two-hump) camels with their traditional camel saddle of just a woollen carpet but their fantastic winter wool coat will also provide you with insulation as well. It's a slow and steady pace of travel where you explore the diverse landscapes of Asia's largest desert - consider it experiential travel where you'll be hosted each evening of the trek by local herding families.

Although the Gobi can be warmer than the rest of the country, the wind chill factor can make the temperature drop. We provide our hand made traditional goat skin blankets. We also provide you with your own hand made full length goat skin del (traditional Mongolian coat) and a pair of Mongolian felt boots.

The camel trek will be vehicle supported.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** With local families. Asian style outside long drop toilet. No showers.
 - **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** -
-

Day Six & Seven

Erdenedalai

Erdenedalai is our secret. Far from the 'highlights,' the 'must sees,' and large tour groups it is a beautiful region little visited by other international visitors. And that's exactly why we make it one of our bases. It's great for slow travel experiences of a more immersive kind.



Meet Nergui

Erdenedalai is Mongolian for 'Jewel Ocean' and although far from the ocean this tight knit and traditional community located in the middle of the Gobi steppe provides a genuine insight into everyday life in Mongolia.

Even though annual precipitation in this area is low, with no permanent lakes and very few springs, roughly 5880 herder households make their home in this transition zone between steppe and desert. It is a beautiful region little visited by other international visitors as it's not considered a highlight by guidebook writers or tour companies. And that's exactly why we make it one of our bases. As mentioned, it's great for slow travel experiences of a more immersive kind. Although just wide stretching semi-desert steppe, the views are expansive.

Having arrived, the rest of your time will be spent at the homes of the herding families that we work with in the area - roughly 14km from the main centre of Erdenedalai. We don't detail what you will do on your arrival - that's because we do things a little differently and leave the plan flexible as this leads to a more respectful and more naturally Mongolian experience but expect to spend the second day exploring the local way of life through the eyes of the rural families we work with in the region.

As well as experiencing the daily way of life or taking an informal cookery lesson, other options include:

- A full-day horse trek
- A bike ride (summer only. We currently have four mountain bikes for use for free)
- For those interested, we also support a local musician who can provide an informal concert - he is also the manager of the local weather station



This is the first of EL's own ger homestays in partnership with the herding families of Erdenedalai. We focused on a region little visited by other western groups as this meant our support would have more impact. The income raised from this homestay provides an additional income to the herding families that host you during your stay. We work side by side with the family making sure our experiences are put together in a way which benefits the families, rather than disrupting their lives. As our guest you benefit from a more intimate and genuine experience.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** With the Nergui herding family. Hot shower available at the local town shower house - your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water. Queue with the locals and enjoy experiencing a little of their daily way of life
 - **Meals:** B/L/D
 - **Travel:** Day Six - Approx 255km total on dirt road (roughly 6-7 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions in the winter months
-

Day Eight

Ulaanbaatar



On arrival back into UB, we'll transfer you to your accommodation in UB and the rest of the day will be yours to create your own experience.

Remember you could use our UB guide to help you to explore the urban side of Mongolian life in downtown Ulaan Baatar. Alternatively, one of our trip assistants could be made available but please let me know in advance.

Logistics

- **Accommodation:** Of your own choice
 - **Meals:** B/L
 - **Travel:** Approx 280km on dirt and asphalt road (roughly 6 hours driving time not including stops). Averages of between 30 and 65 km/hr are usual but depend on road and weather conditions in the winter months
-

Pricing And Group Size

- For all of our winter trips we offer a sliding price scale. We appreciate your holiday funds are precious and so the more people that book so the price comes down and everyone benefits with discounts available for children.
- We appreciate our guests have been financially impacted by Covid-19 so for 2021, we are offering all our trips at our 2020 prices.

Group Size - Minimum of two. Maximum of six.

- 2 Guests US\$ 1530 pp
- 3-4 Guests US\$ 1245 pp
- 5 Guests US\$ 1140 pp
- 6 Guests US\$ 1020 pp

- The above prices include a 15% discount pp as a thank you for choosing to travel with EL outside of the main season. We are keen to extend the season for the benefit of our Mongolian team and the rural families and Mongolian businesses we work with - to make tourism less concentrated around peak season (July) and to help the income of the people we work with be more evenly distributed. Thank you for being part of that :-)

Exclusions

Please be aware that my trip pricing excludes the price of accommodation in UB though. Why? Everyone is different is the standard of accommodation they prefer at the start and end of a trip. As there is now such a variety of hotels in UB it is easier to exclude this cost. I provide a list of ideas covering varying standards and budgets and I can also help with booking. There's everything from a homestay through to Airbnb, US\$10 guesthouses and the Shangri-La.

Winter Camel Trek
8 Days & option of free city walking tour of Ulaanbaatar



I provide detailed Pre Departure Guidelines but this is your 'quick (ish) glance' introduction to the EL travel style.

Why this section? I'm not greedy. EL is not a general travel agency and we don't want to be all things to all people. We are an independent micro business driven by the philosophy to support local so that our style of trip is beneficial to all. We use no outside agencies.

We are not perfect. We are just ordinary people trying our best to do something we love. We are not an ever-expanding group of travel professionals. We make mistakes. But we genuinely know and love Mongolia and are willing and eager to learn, develop and strengthen based on feedback from our guests and from all we work with. If it helps, we get repeat custom.

Travelling In Mongolia In Winter

Mongolia is the second largest landlocked country in the world. The infrastructure is basic. Mongolian people are tough and resilient and make their way of life in both the city and countryside look easier than it is.

Mongolia will challenge you and at times irritate you. We're on hand to iron out any niggles and make the experience as smooth as possible but please remember that most of these hiccups are part of life in Mongolia and therefore travelling in Mongolia. Also, winter trips can sometimes be susceptible to unforeseen problems which might result in last minute itinerary changes. Things will not happen on a perfect schedule and conditions will be very rugged - you will be required to step outside your circle of comfort. Please base your expectations on this important point. You will be expected to be flexible and patient and bring with you your willingness to participate and your sense of adventure and humour.

Travel Times

The travel times are listed under the breakdown of the daily itinerary (under the subheading logistics). Please make sure you are aware of these travel times but remember that an integral part of Mongolian culture is not to ask about the length (time) of any road journey. Mongolia can be a challenging destination, road conditions can change dramatically with the weather and some drives may become longer as a result. But, don't be put off by the road journeys. They're part of Mongolian life. Accept them as part of the experience - Mongolia really is about the journey as much as the destination. Also remember that sunrise is not until around 0830 and sunset can be as early as 1630 so this will also impact on the day.

Your Tour Vehicle - The Russian UAZ \ Furgon Van

- Our Furgons are driver owned but we support the drivers with maintenance fees.
- Each Furgon has a high wheel-base, ample luggage space, a sociable layout with forward and backward facing seats, surround side windows and most importantly, impressive off-road capability.
- As is typical with all Furgons, due to the design of the vehicle, seat-belts are not available (2019 although we're working on it for 2020. Get in touch for details if you're concerned) but our Furgons are fitted with grab handles in the passenger area.
- Each EL vehicle has it's own simple mobile kitchen, its own sunshade, a small library as well as a 220v inverter/charger. We only put a maximum of three to four EL guests per vehicle.

Your EL Team

Female Mongolian trip assistant

- As a female, it is important to me to use my skills and influence to improve the prospects for other women.
- We don't source the best guides that work the tourism circuit and that already have guaranteed work with other companies. Instead, we provide training and development opportunities to Mongolian women that want the opportunity to work in tourism (whether that be for a professional reason, for development of personal skills or for economic empowerment) but that other companies won't take as they don't fit the stereotype or have the Our female Mongolian trip assistants are dynamic women who are searching for an opportunity to train and develop and we provide that long-term opportunity.
- You'll travel with someone who sincerely loves their home country, loves their job and genuinely care about you as our guests. They also have a respectful connection with each of the families we work with and this leads to a more genuine insight for you.
- For us, this is a long-term investment and we invite you to part of this bigger travel philosophy. We're proud to be able to provide a starting block to women in Mongolia.

Male Mongolian Driver

- We employ ten drivers. We know each one and their family personally.
- They are not modern city men - they are more traditional men - often now overlooked by other tour companies who prefer younger more international Mongolians who speak English. We wanted to provide equal opportunities and so as our trip assistants are female and typically younger with a more modern outlook, so our drivers are all male, older and from more traditional backgrounds. We find it is a partnership that works well.
- Yes, their English is limited but their role is to handle the Mongolian roads and not to converse fluently in a multitude of languages.
- Our 'boys' have superb driving skills, are expert mechanics and are supremely talented at the skill of 'mongolcloth' - improvising the Mongolian way. It's a joy to watch so if your vehicle does break down, don't get angry. Instead, watch the drivers do what they do best - improvisation.
- They are of the strong and silent type but take the time to know them and you'll see why we employ them and why they are an essential part of our EL family and great, all-round men.

Our Local Long Term Community Partnerships

- We work with a network of local families throughout the country. These are long-term local partnerships we have built up over the 13 years+ we have been based here. These are also our own personal friendships.
- BUT ... We never ask a family to change their daily living for us. We do not try to change Mongolians or their way of life for our/your own benefit or comfort. We don't ask them to change their daily schedule or to put on an 'act' as this would lead to a contrived experience.
- BUT ... Guidebooks portray Mongolians as being warm and welcoming. They are. But they can also be stubborn, taciturn, reserved and very very indifferent. Yes, they can be welcoming but they really do not like displays of impatience, superiority, arrogance or anger and will make it known when they are not happy. They also rarely wear a watch let alone work to an agenda.
- BUT ... As in our everyday lives, sometimes plans change and a family has to go to UB (for a medical reason etc). You will almost certainly comment that you will wish you had more interaction with local families but their livestock and their family life must come first. Reverse the situation for a moment and think about the impact on your life if visitors wanted to document everything about you.
- BUT ... Nothing is planned in any program, because we do not disturb the rhythm of life of the working families visited. We are just trying to share / experience a portion of their life.
- **Yes, there will be tasks in which you can participate. But, you need to be proactive. Offer your time and help.**

Logistics - Meals

- Mongolia one of the most remote countries in the world with a population of 70 million+ livestock. The food Mongolians eat reflect this.
- However, each of our vehicles has a simple portable kitchen as it offers you more freedom and flexibility as we're not reliant on anyone else to provide meals. It also means we can have picnic lunches en-route so as we prepare them you can be exploring the local landscapes or sitting and taking in the view.
- But, it's not the same as a modern well-equipped kitchen. Also, your trip assistants prepare your meals and we're not professional chefs. Also, we take food miles into consideration and prefer to purchase produce local to Mongolia so we do not provide kale smoothies or Thai curries or paella or Chinese stir fry. We just provide honest, heartening grub.
- We buy as much fresh produce as possible but fresh fruit is not available daily. Please remember where you are and that there will be limitations as to what we can provide. If you're the type of person that must have five pieces of fruit a day then you may struggle.
- We often include the families we work with in our meals and so cook to please all including the EL team. However, we do adapt to those with dietary requirements. We frequently cater for vegetarians, those who are following dairy or gluten free diets and even vegans but as mentioned, there will be limitations in place.

Logistics - Weather

Mongolia's weather system has a reputation for a reason. We'll prepare you for what weather to expect during your trip (including links to the long-range weather forecast for the regions you will be visiting) and also provide a detailed packing list on booking. Although the temperatures can scare at first sight, it is a very dry cold and with good clothes, -25°C in Mongolia could be compared with -5°C in Europe. However, the concept of cold is very subjective! We need you to be responsible for yourself. Do not try to put a brave face on it. It is not a competition to see who is the strongest - remember your EL team and the Mongolians you will meet are used to the winter weather conditions. You may not be.

Accommodation - Family Operated Ger Accommodation & Homestays

- As much as possible we use rural family operated ger accommodation. We prefer to support this local form of accommodation as it helps provide a supplementary income and extra financial security for them meaning they are one step further away from having to consider urban migration.
- These are all families we work in long-term local community partnership with - we NEVER turn up unannounced and we never just turn up to a herding family demanding accommodation.
- The circumstances and type of ger accommodation provided will change from family to family. Consider them as small rural businesses NOT rustic luxury homestays. Some accommodation is offered by herders (maybe one separate ger), some is offered by 'retired' herders who no longer migrate (two to four separate gers), some by families that live in small town communities and some by families that own small ger camp businesses (mini ger camps of between 7 to 10 gers). On a couple of itineraries it may also involve sleeping on the floor of the family ger on a mat (such as in western Mongolia).
- Be prepared for a variety of standards. Please remember that this is someone's way of life and home and that they provide what they can in relation to their circumstances.
- Beds will vary in comfort - most rural family members still traditionally sleep on the floor so don't really understand the concept of double memory foam mattresses! See below for more details on toilets and showers.
- You should have your own private ger either to share as an EL group (small group trip) or on your own (tailor made trip) but we don't offer exclusivity as this limits the income of the families so do expect other westerners during peak times. We try to get the right balance but during peak season please accept that you might see other westerners

Accommodation - Toilets & Showers (Family & Homestay)

- **A majority of Mongolia's population do not have access to running water.**
- Toilets - Some will be better than expected. Some will be worse than expected. Most will outside long (or short) drop Asian style and if it is at a family home then the toilet will be shared by you and the family. The toilets are not there to disgust you - this is the reality of life on the ground.
- Showers - Most Mongolians visit the local town shower house. So this is what you do as well. It gives you an introduction to real daily life for a majority of Mongolians in both urban and rural areas as well as a hot shower. You get your own private cubicle with plenty of hot water. Queue with the locals and enjoy experiencing a little of their daily way of life

Accommodation - Local Hotels

- We don't use hotels in all itineraries.
- Where we do use a hotel, it is locally owned - built for the passing Mongolian trade rather than for western visitors so they have been built with the local population in mind so they are not corporate chains. However, one or two will pleasantly surprise you.
- Why do we do this? It brings money and support into the local communities. As well as staying at the hotel we eat in local restaurants and buy our tour produce from the local market so you get a more real insight into the way of life for the locality.

Accommodation Winter

- Facilities will be more limited than you have maybe experienced on previous winter trips elsewhere.
- In towns, accommodation is heated through a central piping system which gets turned on in late September and turned off in May. You may find the rooms overly warm and stuffy but there is typically no thermostat so the only option is to open a window.
- Apart from in the towns, your accommodation will be in family provided accommodation where there won't be hot showers and the toilets will be OUTSIDE Asian style long drops. All family accommodation will be prepared for winter and heated by a stove but you're probably used to an insulated house with central heating. There is a substantial difference.

Winter Camel Trek
8 Days & option of free city walking tour of Ulaanbaatar

21st Century Mongolia



Mongolia is frequently depicted as a pristine untouched wilderness little changed since the time of Chinggis Khan. But this is not 21st Century Mongolia - this is stereotype or clichéd Mongolia. The traditional culture still remains but there is a drive for modernity and progress.

Our trips focus on 21st Century Mongolia - we try to provide a 'realistic' overview rather than that portrayed by guidebooks and other tour companies. To just want to experience the life of the traditional nomadic way of life is to ignore a majority of the population. We're proud of the long-term local community partnerships we have formed with all spectrums of Mongolian society - from a philanthropist in Ulaanbaatar, to female Kazakh eagle huntresses and also the Tsaatan community. However, Mongolians live in the cities of Darkhan and Erdenet. They also live in the other provincial centres as well as the smaller town and rural communities. There are teachers and Christians and those with disabilities and policemen and musicians and military personnel and accountants and miners and geologists and drivers and shop owners and construction workers and street cleaners - they are all Mongolians.

Don't come in search of what you term the authentic Mongolia. Discard the perceptions that perpetuate the stereotypes of Mongolia and aim for a more true encounter of real life. We ask you to ditch your preconceptions based on what you've read and watched. Instead come with an open mind and be challenged, surprised and often delighted.

Winter Camel Trek
8 Days & option of free city walking tour of Ulaanbaatar



There's a hunger for knowledge, understanding, and excellence that drives Mongolian society, and things are changing quickly, but remember that a lot of major changes have happened within just a couple generations. Be patient with Mongolia. While it works through the changes that are going to make it better place, savour the gifts it offers and try to spend less time worrying about small issues that aren't being met - such as hot showers or lack of western toilets. Remember, Mongolians are living this life everyday through all seasons not just for a few weeks.

Mongolians are tough people and make living in their country look easy. But, Mongolia is not an easy option - tourism is still in its infancy so there is only a rudimentary tourist infrastructure in place. It's actually quite refreshing but will be challenging for you.

As Jack Weatherford writes in *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* - 'Compared to the difficulty of daily life for the herders, living permanently in those areas, ours were only the smallest of irritations.'

Any questions, queries or concerns? Just send them across to me at jess@eternal-landscapes.co.uk. I am always happy to be of help!

Jess